

Last US Ebola patient cured, released from hospital (Update)

November 11 2014, by Brigitte Dusseau

The last known Ebola patient in the United States, a New York doctor who contracted the virus while treating infected people in West Africa, was released from the hospital on Tuesday after being declared cured.

President Barack Obama led the tributes as Craig Spencer was discharged from Bellevue Hospital in New York where he had been treated after being diagnosed with the disease.

The White House said Obama had called Spencer from Beijing to salute the doctor for "his selflessness and compassion in fighting this disease on the front lines in West Africa."

Spencer had earlier appeared with New York Mayor Bill de Blasio to confirm his recovery.

"New York City's first and only Ebola case is successfully treated. Dr Spencer is Ebola-free and New York City is Ebola-free," de Blasio proclaimed to cheers and applause.

Spencer, 33, had been admitted to the hospital three weeks earlier after returning to the United States from Guinea, which along with Sierra Leone and Liberia is one of three hard-hit West African countries where the often fatal disease is raging.

He returned to the United States on October 17, flying into John F. Kennedy International Airport, after returning from several weeks

volunteering with the Doctors Without Borders group.

Spencer's case stirred fears because he traversed New York in the days following his return, using the subway and a taxi, dining in a popular restaurant and going bowling with friends, before falling ill and isolating himself.

He said he was grateful for the high-quality medical care he received during his illness, and urged that more be done for those suffering from Ebola in Africa.

"Today, I am healthy and no longer infectious. My early detection reporting and now recovery from Ebola, speaks to the effectiveness of the protocols that are in place for health staff returning for from West Africa," he said.

"While my case has garnered international attention, it is important to remember that my infection represents but a fraction of the more than 13,000 reported cases to date in West Africa ... where families are being torn apart and communities are destroyed."

'Hug for a hero'

In what has become something of a ritual when public officials pronounce Ebola patients cured, de Blasio gave Spencer a hug of appreciation for his selfless volunteer work with Ebola patients in Africa—and to demonstrate that the public need have no fear of contracting the disease from him.

"It is a good feeling to hug a hero, and we have a hero here in our midst," de Blasio said, adding that Spencer deserved praise as "someone who served others, no matter how much danger."

A total of 289 people in New York continue to be monitored for possible Ebola symptoms, including Spencer's fiancée and staff who helped treat the doctor, authorities said.

Spencer is one of nine people to have been treated for Ebola in the United States, all but one of whom have survived.

The lone fatality, Thomas Eric Duncan, who had traveled to Dallas, Texas from his native Liberia, died of Ebola last month after a delay in his treatment of several days after he first began to exhibit symptoms.

Duncan's illness, the first known case of Ebola in the United States, created a national panic, which in the end proved to be unmerited, that a widespread US outbreak could occur.

Two nurses who cared for him contracted the disease, but have since recovered, and no other known cases developed.

In another controversial case, Kaci Hickox, a nurse who returned last month from West Africa and who refused to remain in isolation because she had developed no Ebola symptoms, was released from home quarantine in Maine Monday after remaining healthy during a 21-day incubation period.

Some 5,000 people have died from Ebola, mostly in West Africa, where underfunded health systems have contributed to the rampant spread of the disease.

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